

"THE FORGED COUPON"

BY THE
COUNT
LEO
TOLSTOY.
TRANSLATED FROM
THE ORIGINAL BY
HERMAN BERNSTEIN.



PART ONE.

Fedor Mikhailovich Smokovnikov, chairman of the Court of the Exchequer, a man of incorruptible honesty and proud of his dispassionate, not only a free thinker but despising any manifestation of religiousness, which he considered a remnant of superstitions, returned home from court in the most ill-tempered frame of mind. The Governor had written to him a most stupid document, from which one might construe a remark that Fedor Mikhailovich had acted dishonestly. Fedor Mikhailovich grew very angry and immediately wrote a bold and sharp reply.

At home it seemed to Fedor Mikhailovich that everything was being done to spite him. It was five minutes of 5. He had expected that dinner would be served immediately, but the dinner was not yet ready. Fedor Mikhailovich slammed the door and went into his room. Some one knocked at his door. "Who the deuce is there now?" he thought, but shouted: "Who is there?"

A gymnasium student of the fifth grade, a youth of 15, the son of Fedor Mikhailovich, entered the room.

"What do you want?"

"Monday is the first."

"What's Monday?"

"It was customary that every first of the month the father gave his son an allowance of three rubles for his amusements. Fedor Mikhailovich frowned, took out his pocketbook, looked at a white and drew out a coupon of two rubles and a half, then he took out the purse where he kept his silver and counted out five copeks more. The son was silent and did not take the money.

"Papa, please give me some in advance."

"What?"

"I would not have asked, but I borrowed upon my word of honor. I promised."

"As an honest man I cannot—"

"I need three rubles more. Really I would not ask."

"That is, I would not ask, but simply—"

"Please, papa."

"I have told you."

"But, papa, only this time."

"You are getting an allowance of three rubles and you are always short. At your age I wasn't getting even half a ruble."

"All my friends are getting more now. Petrov and Ivanitsky are getting fifty rubles a month."

"And I am telling you that if you will behave as you do not will become a scoundrel."

"That's all I say."

"That's all you say. But you never care to put yourself in my position. I will be forced to become a scoundrel."

"It's easy for you to speak."

"Get out, you good for nothing. Go!"

Fedor Mikhailovich jumped up and rushed toward his son.

"Get out! You deserve to be whipped."

The son became frightened and argued, but he was more angered than frightened, and bending his head he rushed out of the room quickly. Fedor Mikhailovich did not intend to strike him, but he was glad of his anger, and as he escorted his son he kept scolding him loudly for some time.

When the maid came in and announced that dinner was ready Fedor Mikhailovich rose from his seat.

"At last," he said, "but now I am not hungry any more."

And he went into the dining room frowning.

At the table his wife said something to him, but he hurled a curt answer so angry that she became silent. The son, who maintained silence without lifting his eyes from his plate. They ate in silence and then rose silently and went away.

After dinner the gymnasium student returned to his room, took from his pocket the coupon and the change, threw them on the table, then removed his uniform and put on a jacket. At first the student looked up the outworn Latin grammar, then he fastened the door with a hook, fastened with his hand the money from the table into the drawer, took out a key, opened the box, filled one, then turned into it and began to smoke.

He sat over the grammar and his notes about two hours without understanding anything. Then he got up, and standing his heels commenced to pace the room and to recall everything that had happened between him and his father. He recalled all the abusive words his father said, and especially his angry face, as if he heard and saw him just now. "Good for nothing! You deserve to be whipped!"

And the more he thought of it the more angry he was at his father. He recalled his father's words: "I see that you will turn out to be a scoundrel. You may as well know it."

"If so I will turn out to be a scoundrel," he thought.

"It is easy for him to speak. He has forgotten how he acted when he was young. What crime have I committed? I simply went to the theatre, I had no money so I borrowed it from Petya Onoshsky. What wrong was there in that? Another father would have been sorry, would have questioned me about it, but he only scolds me and thinks of me but himself. When he wants something he shouts all over the house, but when I do not love him, I don't know whether everybody feels that."

"But I do not love him."

The maid knocked at his door. She brought him a note.

"They asked for an answer without fail."

The note read: "This is the third time I am asking you to give me back the 20 rubles which you took from me, but you are not giving me. Honest people do not act like that. I ask you to send it to me immediately by this messenger. I am myself desperately in need. Is it possible that you cannot get it? Yours, judging from whether you will return the money or not, hatefully or respectfully, GRISHINSKY."

"Just think of it. What a hog! He can't wait. I'll make another attempt."

Mitya went to his mother. That was his last hope. His mother was at kind hearted woman and was unable to refuse, and she would perhaps have helped him, but she was alarmed that day by the illness of the younger son, the two-year-old Petya. She grew angry at Mitya because he came and made a noise and she immediately refused him.

He muttered something under his breath and walked out. She felt sorry for her son and called him back.

"Wait, Mitya," she said. "I have no money just now, but I will get it for you to-morrow."

Mitya was still boiling with rage at his father.

"What is the use of getting it to-morrow if I need it now? You may as well know that I will go to a friend."

He walked out, slamming the door.

"There is no other way out; he will show me where to pawn my watch," he thought, feeling the watch in his pocket.

Mitya took the coupon and the change from the drawer, put on his coat and went to Makhin.

II

Makhin was a gymnasium student with mustaches. He played cards, knew women and always had money. He lived at his aunt's house. Mitya knew that Makhin was a bad fellow, but when he was with him he was involuntarily under his influence. Makhin was at home, about to go to the theatre. There was the scent of perfumed soap and eau de cologne in his uncle's little room.

"That's a trifle, my dear," said Makhin after Mitya had told him of his misfortune. Had shown him the coupon and the fifty copeks and said that he needed nine rubles. "You may pawn your watch, and you may do something still better," said Makhin, winking one eye.

"What do you mean by something still better?"

"It is very simple."

Makhin took the coupon.

"Make a 1 in front of the 2 50 and you will have 12 50."

"Are there such coupons?"

"Of course! There are even 1,000 ruble coupons. I passed one like that."

"Impossible!"

"Well, shall I go ahead?" said Makhin, taking the pen and outstretching the coupon with the fingers of his left hand.

"But that is wrong."

"Indeed," thought Mitya, as he recalled his father scolding him, calling him "scoundrel," "how I will be a scoundrel!" He looked at Makhin's face. Makhin looked at him, smiling calmly.

"Well, shall I go ahead?"

"Go ahead."

Makhin carefully drew a 1.

"Now we will go to a store. There is one around the corner, where they sell photographers' supplies. By the way, I need a frame for this person."

He took out a photograph of a big eyed girl with long hair and a splendid bust.

"Isn't she a peach? Eh?"

"Yes, yes. Of course."

"Very simple. Come."

Makhin dressed himself and both went out together.

III

The bell rang at the entrance door of the photographer's supplies store. The students entered, surveying the empty store with supplies upon the shelves and shoes upon the counters. An un- sightly woman with a kindly face came out from the rear door and stationing herself behind the counter asked what they wanted.

"A good frame, madam."

"At what price?" asked the lady, quickly and skillfully assorting frames of various shapes, with her hands in mittens, with swollen finger joints. "This is 20 copeks and these are more expensive. And this one is very pretty, a new style, a ruble and 20 copeks."

"Well, give me this one. Can't you make it cheaper? Wouldn't you take a ruble?"

"This is a one price store," said the lady with dignity.

"Very well then," said Makhin, placing the coupon upon the counter. "Let me have the frame and the change, but make it quick, we may be late for the theatre."

"You have time yet," said the lady and commenced to examine the coupon with her short sighted eyes.

"It will look pretty in this frame, eh?" said Makhin, turning to Mitya.

"Haven't you any other money?" asked the saleslady.

"That's the trouble that we haven't. My father gave it to me and I have to cash it."

"Haven't you a ruble and 20 copeks?"

"I have 50 copeks. Are you afraid we are trying to pass counterfeit money?"

"No, I am not."

"Well, then, give it back to me, we'll get it cashed elsewhere."

"How much change do I owe you?"

"Eleven rubles and some copeks."

The saleslady clicked the counting board, opened the cash drawer, took out a ten ruble bill and stirring the change with her hand picked out six twenty copek pieces and two five copek pieces.

"Please wrap this up," said Makhin, taking the money slowly.

"Right away."

The saleslady wrapped the frame around and tied it with a cord.

Mitya drew his breath only after the bell of the entrance door had rung behind them and they came out into the street.

"Here is ten rubles for you, and let me have the rest. I'll give it back to you."

Makhin went to the theatre, while Mitya went to Grushetsky and settled his account with him.

IV

An hour after the departure of the students the storekeeper returned home and began to count his receipts.

"Oh, you clumsy fool! What a fool!" cried the storekeeper to his wife as soon as he saw the coupon and noticed immediately that it was forged. "Why do you take coupons?"

"You yourself took coupons in my presence, and twelve ruble coupons at that," said the wife, confused, vexed and ready to cry. "I don't know myself how they cheated me, those students," she said. "The handsome young man looked so comely it felt."

"You are a comely it felt fool," the husband continued, scolding her while counting the cash. "When I take a coupon I know and I see what is written upon it. But you must have been gazing only at the faces of the students, now that you are getting old."

The wife could not endure this and grew angry herself.

"A real man, you condemn only others, but you yourself lost 24 rubles at cards, and yet that was nothing."

"I am different."

"I don't want to talk to you," said the wife, went into her room and recalled how her family did not want her to get married to this man, regarding her husband much beneath her in social position, and how she alone insisted upon marrying him; she recalled her deceased child, the indifference of her husband toward their loss, and how she commenced to hate him so that she thought would be good if he died. But on reconsidering this, she became frightened by her own feelings and hastened to dress herself and go out. When her husband came home, she was not there. Without waiting for her, he dressed and went alone to one of their acquaintances, a French instructor who had invited them to an evening party.

V

The instructor in French, a Russian Pole, gave a formal tea with sweet poetry, and after that the people seated themselves at several tables to play whist.

The wife of the dealer in photographer's supplies sat down with the host, an officer and an old, deaf lady in a wig, the widow of the owner of a musical store, a great lover of the game and an excellent player. The cards came luckily to the wife of the dealer in photographer's supplies, and she gave them a slam twice. Near her stood a plate with grapes and pears and she played in a happy frame of mind.

"Why isn't Yevgeny Mikhailovich here yet?" asked the hostess, who was sitting at the next table. "We will mark him down as the fifth."

"I suppose he is busy with his accounts," said the wife of Yevgeny Mikhailovich. "To-night we are settling the bills for provisions and for food."

And recalling the scene with her husband, she frowned and her hands in her mittens quivered for anger at him.

"Talk of the devil and he will come," said the host, turning to Yevgeny, who had entered. "Why so late?"

"All kinds of affairs," replied Yevgeny Mikhailovich in a cheerful voice, rubbing his hands. And to his wife's surprise he walked over to her and said:

"Do you know I have passed the coupon?"

"Really?"

"Yes, to a peasant for wood."

And Yevgeny Mikhailovich told them all with great indignation his wife inserted some of the details into his story—how unscrupulous gymnasium students had cheated his wife.

"Well, now to work," he said, sitting down by the table when his turn came, and he dealt the cards.

VI

And indeed Yevgeny Mikhailovich passed the coupon to the peasant Ivan Mironov for wood.

Ivan Mironov's business consisted of buying in the lumber yards one sague or Russian measure equivalent to seven English feet of wood, which he carried to the city and arranged the wood so that he gained a quarter of a sague. On this day, which turned out to be unfortunate for Ivan Mironov, he started out early in the morning with an eighth of a sague of wood and after selling it quickly he put another load on his wagon, hoping to sell it, but he carried it about in the city looking for a customer, yet no one wanted to buy it. He met for the most part experienced city dwellers who were familiar with the usual tricks of the peasants selling wood, and they did not believe that he was carrying his wood from the village, as he assured them. He became very hungry, he was chilled in his outworn short fur coat and his torn jacket; toward evening the cold reached twenty degrees. His little horse, which he sold it because he was about to sell it, stopped, so that Ivan Mironov was ready to sell his wood at a loss, when he met Yevgeny Mikhailovich, who had stepped into a cigar store for tobacco on his way home.

"Take it, sir! I'll let you have it cheap. My horse has stopped."

"Where do you come from?"

"From the village. My own wood; good, dry wood."

"We know you. Well, how much will you take?"

Ivan Mironov asked a high price, then he reduced it, and finally gave it to him at the regular price.

"I am doing this only for you, sir, because it is near," he said.

Yevgeny Mikhailovich did not dicker very much, rejoicing at the thought that he would pass the coupon. Somehow Ivan Mironov managed to drag the wood into the yard, pulling the shafts himself, and then he unloaded it in the barn. At first Ivan Mironov hesitated to take the coupon, but Yevgeny Mikhailovich persuaded him, and he appeared to him to be such a man of importance that he agreed to take it.

Entering through the back door into the maid servants' room, Ivan Mironov made the sign of the cross, thawed of the icicles on his beard and, turning up the fold of his coat, drew out a leather purse, from which he took out eight rubles and fifty copeks and gave him the change; then he wrapped the coupon in a paper and put it into his purse.

Having thanked the gentleman, according to the custom, Ivan Mironov drove the little mare, which was doomed to death and which was hardly able to move her legs, beating her not with the whip but with the stick; thus he drove off in his empty cart to the tavern.

At the tavern Ivan Mironov ordered eight copeks worth of wine and tea, and having warmed himself so that he was even perspiring, talked with the janitor who was sitting at his table in the happiest frame of mind. He talked with him and told him all about his circumstances. He told him that he came from the village of Vasilyevsky, about twelve miles from the city, that he had received his share of land from his father and his brothers, and that he now lived with his wife and two children, the elder of whom was going to school and was no help to him. He told him that he was lodging in the city and that he was going to the horse market on the following day to sell his jade mare and that he would perhaps buy a little horse if he should see one that would suit him. He told him that he had twenty-four rubles and that half his money was in the form of a coupon. He took out the coupon and showed it to the janitor. The janitor was an illiterate man, but he said that he had changed such money for tenants, that the money was good, but that there were counterfeiters, and therefore advised him to make sure by crushing it right there at the bar. Ivan Mironov handed the coupon to the waiter and asked him to bring the change, but the waiter brought no change; a bald-headed clerk with a glossy face came over with the coupon in his bloated hand.

"Your money is no good," he said, showing the coupon but not returning it.

"It is good money; a gentleman gave it to me."

"It is no good, because it is a counterfeit."

"If it is counterfeit money then give it back to me."

"No, my dear, we must teach you a lesson. You have forged it together with other sharpers."

"Let me have my money; what right have you?"

"Silly! Call over the assistant," the man in charge of the refreshment bar turned to the waiter.

Ivan Mironov was tipsy. And when he was tipsy he was turbulent. He seized the clerk by the collar and shouted:

"Give it back to me. I will go to the man who gave it to me. I know where he is."

The clerk tore himself away from Ivan Mironov and the horses began to crack.

"Ah, that's what you are doing? Hold on to him!"

The waiter seized Ivan Mironov and a policeman appeared immediately. As an official he listened to what the trouble was and decided immediately.

"To the police station."

The policeman put the coupon in his pocketbook and took Ivan Mironov, together with his horse, to the police station.

VII

Ivan Mironov passed the night at the police station with drunkards and thieves. Almost at noon he was called before the police inspector. The inspector examined him and sent him with a policeman to the dealer in photographer's supplies. Ivan Mironov remembered the street and the house.

When the policeman called the storekeeper and presented to him the coupon and Ivan Mironov, who identified him as the same man who had given him the coupon, Yevgeny Mikhailovich first looked surprised, then stern.

"What's the matter with you? It seems you are out of your wits. This is the first time I see him."

"It's a sin, sir, we are going to die," said Ivan Mironov.

"What has happened to him? You must have been sleepy. You sold it to somebody else, said Yevgeny Mikhailovich. "However, wait a while, I'll go and ask my wife whether she bought any wood yesterday."

Yevgeny Mikhailovich went out and immediately called the janitor, a handsome, unusually strong and clever dandy, and did not send for his wife, as he did not need her. He knew as many women in the city as he wanted, and much nearer

wood was last taken, he should say that it came from the lumber yard and that they bought no wood from any peasants.

"There is a peasant here saying that I gave him a forged coupon. A stupid peasant—God knows what he is saying—but you are a man of understanding. You better say that we buy our wood only at the lumber yard. And I was going to give this to you long ago for a jacket," Yevgeny Mikhailovich added, handing the janitor five rubles.

Vasily took the money, his eyes flashed as he looked at the bill, then at Yevgeny's face, shook his hair and smiled lightly.

"Of course they are a stupid lot. It's their ignorance. Don't worry. I know what to say."

No matter how much Ivan Mironov pleaded tearfully with Yevgeny to admit that the coupon was his and with the janitor to substantiate his words both Yevgeny and the janitor stuck to their statement that they never bought any wood from peasants. The policeman took Ivan Mironov back to the police station on the charge that he had forged the coupon.

Only at the advice of a drunken scribe, Ivan Mironov, after giving five rubles to the police inspector, managed to elude the guards without his coupon and with seven rubles instead of the twenty-four he had the day before. Ivan Mironov drank and returned home to his wife dead drunk and with a disfigured face.

His wife was pregnant and sick. She started to scold her husband; he pushed her away; she commenced to beat him. Without answering he lay down on the sleeping bag, his face downward, and started to sob loudly.

Only on the following morning his wife understood what had happened and, believing her husband, cursed the out-throat storekeeper who had cheated her Ivan.

And Ivan, after sobbing up, recalled what the workman with whom he was drinking the night before had advised him, and he decided to see a lawyer and complain.

VIII

The lawyer took the case not so much because of the money he could get but because he believed Ivan's story and he was wrought up over the unscrupulous manner in which the peasant had been deceived.

Both the plaintiff and the defendant



"GET OUT! YOU GOOD FOR NOTHING. GO!"

seized the clerk by the collar and shouted:

"Give it back to me. I will go to the man who gave it to me. I know where he is."

The clerk tore himself away from Ivan Mironov and the horses began to crack.

"Ah, that's what you are doing? Hold on to him!"

The waiter seized Ivan Mironov and a policeman appeared immediately. As an official he listened to what the trouble was and decided immediately.

"To the police station."

The policeman put the coupon in his pocketbook and took Ivan Mironov, together with his horse, to the police station.

VII

Ivan Mironov passed the night at the police station with drunkards and thieves. Almost at noon he was called before the police inspector. The inspector examined him and sent him with a policeman to the dealer in photographer's supplies. Ivan Mironov remembered the street and the house.

When the policeman called the storekeeper and presented to him the coupon and Ivan Mironov, who identified him as the same man who had given him the coupon, Yevgeny Mikhailovich first looked surprised, then stern.

"What's the matter with you? It seems you are out of your wits. This is the first time I see him."

"It's a sin, sir, we are going to die," said Ivan Mironov.

"What has happened to him? You must have been sleepy. You sold it to somebody else, said Yevgeny Mikhailovich. "However, wait a while, I'll go and ask my wife whether she bought any wood yesterday."

Yevgeny Mikhailovich went out and immediately called the janitor, a handsome, unusually strong and clever dandy, and did not send for his wife, as he did not need her. He knew as many women in the city as he wanted, and much nearer

women than his wife. With every passing year Vasily forgot ever more and more the law of the village and familiarized himself with the ways of the city. There everything was rough, gray, poor, slovenly; here everything was refined, good, clean, rich, in perfect order. And he felt ever more and more convinced that the village folks lived without any understanding, like beasts of the forests, while here in the city there were real people. He read books by good authors, novels; he went to see plays at the Narodny Dom. In the village he could not see it even in his dreams. In the village the old people say: Live lawfully with your wife, work, don't eat too much, don't display elegant clothes; while here wise, learned people, consequently people who know the real laws, live for their own pleasure. And all is well.

Before the incident with the coupon Vasily did not believe that the city people knew no law by which their life was guided. It always seemed to him that he did not know their law but that there was such a law. But after the incident with the coupon, and mainly after his false oath, which brought him no harm, notwithstanding his fear, but on the contrary brought him ten rubles, he felt altogether convinced that there were no laws of any kind and that one should live for his own pleasure. Thus he had lived and thus he continued to live. At first he made profit on purchases he made for the tenants, but that was not sufficient for all his expenses, and wherever he could he started to steal money and valuable things from the homes of the tenants, and then he stole a pocketbook from Yevgeny Mikhailovich. Y